

An Interconnected Phenomenological Experience of a Human Being

An Honor Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Interconnected Human Experience

Abstract

Human beings are highly complex social creatures; we create intricate systems of communication that are constantly evolving due to ever growing need to be in a constant state of connection. Humans may have the ability to survive in solitary situations, but will thrive when connections are established with other beings. This interconnectivity allows humans to create an environment in which learning becomes an intricate system that is constantly growing by building upon past knowledge; therefore, surpass the knowledge of The Individual rather than participate as a portion of an expanding, collective System. However, as humans, we invent boundaries for several reasons, thus hindering the interconnected, conscious experience and yielding a skewed phenomenological view of life.

When humans place personal limitations, it both over-simplifies and further complicates that individual's experiences. "Labels" may help classify items, emotions, situations, other individuals, and experiences; however, the act of classifying undoubtedly creates restrictions. Be that as it may, humans are inclined in their usage because these self-fabricated distinctions provide a sense of familiarity and comfort due to maintaining a status quo that is so deeply ingrained into human nature. When an individual or situation contradicts our personalized labels, the unknown may create a moment of chaos within our "carefully-controlled" world. I believe that our ever-growing list of "labels" have contrived an environment of sequestered, diminutive social circles impacting the uniquely connective experience we share as human beings. Through an individualized analysis of the experiences of a single human within several stages of life,

I devise a public viewing with the visual manifestation of aforementioned experiences. The visuals are created using several fine arts mediums, such as paintings, drawings, photographs, and sculptures. A public viewing is essential to my interactive creative project due to the desired end result: demonstrating that despite the more superficial commonalities amongst us as individuals, our masked self and past experiences may connect us to a greater and deeper extent than we may presume.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mr. Vance Bell for his faith in me and aiding my creative journey of conceptual ideas to their physical manifestations. I highly appreciate that he always viewed me as an artist, and encourage my artistic exploration.

I would also like to thank Mr. Gary Pavlechko, who first ignited the spark of curiosity that lead to my idea that a person is a place which was the bases for this whole project. I felt I had found a kindred spirit in him.

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Progress Analysis Statement

In a previous course, my professor raised the following question: How do space and place differ? One of my tasks was to apply this question to human experience. What significance, if any, does this hold? I pondered the impact space had on my life, which modified to my experiences and personal journeys as a human being. Through my realizations, I conjured the idea that a person is a place. With this newfound truth, I further devised the concept that the individual consists of several places at a given time.

This new inquiry regarding people lead me to more questions about the components that create a human being. Lilienfeld defines psychology as “the scientific study of the mind, brain, and behavior,” which seemed like an appropriate subject to begin with (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Namy, & Woolf, 2014, p. 5). Psychology and philosophy were not always mutually exclusive. In 1879, Wilhelm Wundt revolutionized what we now know as psychology with the establishment of his scientific laboratory at the University of Leipzig in Germany (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Namy, & Woolf, 2014, p. 27). This accomplishment named him the father of psychology and allowed other theorists to develop the branches of psychology: E.B. Titchener’s Structuralism, William James’ Functionalism, Ivan Pavlov and B.F. Skinner’s Behaviorism, Jean Piaget’s Cognitivism, and Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalysis. These individuals’ ideas were considered as truths or quite the opposite outlandish, and with time deemed accurate or simply erroneous, meaning the definition of what it means to be human is constantly evolving. While these theories have been challenged by newer research, the questions their research sought to answer are timeless and essential to the mysterious field of “humanness.”

Essentially, these theorists tried to answer the question what makes humans human. What are the characteristics of humanness? What makes each one of us different from the

approximately other 7,466,800,000 humans (2010)? What unifies us? The capabilities of our mental processes that have evolved to an extent of hyper-awareness of the self and other. I decided that I would not be able to fully understand humanness without also comprehending the impact human biology, both primal and evolved mental processes, has on human experience.

The Brain is a curious instrument that controls human mental and motor functions. The brain only weighs approximately three pounds, roughly two or three percent of the average weight of a person. However, the brain utilizes approximately fifteen percent of blood supply and twenty percent of the oxygen and glucose. This means that the brain “uses up to ten times as much of the body’s resources as would be expected for its weight (Cohen, 2016, p. 100).” The Brain is a high functioning machine that requires certain amount of substance in order to work the most efficiently, otherwise brain is impaired and the results are radical.

The Brain has many functions and possesses astonishing plasticity. The brain is divided into several systems based on the specific function of that system. As human beings, we all have a nervous system that is divided between the Central and Peripheral Nervous System. The Central Nervous System (CNS) consists of the brain and the spinal cord. The brain itself is composed of three major structures: cerebrum, brainstem, and cerebellum.

The cerebrum contains high levels of neurons, which contribute to the higher symbolic functions regarding language, thinking, reasoning, memory, personality, emotion, and attention (Bhatnagar, 2013, p. 16). The cerebrum is the cortex of the brain (or the pinkish, “squiggly,” bulging mass cartoons often depict as the brain), that houses our more complex functions that create our distinctive selves. When damaged or altered in some way, the results can be drastic, as in the case of Phineas Gage in 1848. Gage worked as a railroad foreman in rural Vermont when an explosion propelled an iron rod through his prefrontal cortex (the ‘command center’ for

personality). The man survived and was quite functional, but this portion of his brain was severely damaged. As J.M. Harlow, Gage's physician, wrote, "his mind was radically changed, so decidedly that his friends and acquaintances said he was 'no longer Gage'" (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Namy, & Woolf, 2014, p.96). Since the consensus was that Gage's personality had drastically change, doctors inferred different functions were housed in unrelated areas of the brain.

While exploring this incident, I questioned how influential was this small portion of brain. Could it really change us completely personality-wise, and create other versions of ourselves altering our humanness? I wondered if our personalities were fixed or if we consciously select the characteristic we possess. Meaning we have access to the other portions of personality, but due to past experiences or simply our personal preferences, we decide to disconnect them; when the brain is injured and trying to rewire itself, it opens up those old connections again giving us access to those previously locked areas.

In Gage's situation, the influence of the injury was dramatic; however, in August of 2012 another case of a traumatic brain injury to the frontal lobe of the brain was reported. A Brazilian construction worker by the name of Eduardo Leite suffered a similar incident to Gage's; the Huffington Post reported that "the rod fell from the fifth floor of a building Leite was working on, piercing his hard hat before entering the back of his skull and exiting between his eyes." Leite survived the incident, was lucid on his way to the hospital, and was able to communicate with his doctors. Surprisingly, there appeared to be a lack of personality change; however, Marla Hamberger, an associate professor of clinical neuropsychology at the Neurological Institute of New York, makes the argument that the onset of change may be gradual in nature and that Leite will most likely still experience a sort of change in social behavior and higher cognitive function (MacKinnon, 2017). I find it astonishing that how we interpret

ourselves and the world surrounding us is located in a small space that makes up less than three percent of our physical being.

While the cortex is the center of individuality, the subcortical regions, meaning the brainstem and cerebellum, regulate more basic, but predominate functions that are essential to living. These structures regulate fine and gross motor skills, motor planning, transportation of sensory information, endocrine and autonomic nervous system, process memory for spatial locations, the levels of arousal and fear, coordination and balance, breathing, heartbeats, and internal temperature (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Namy, & Woolf, 2014, p. 94). On the most fundamental level, we all survive using these basic functions. I picture this portion of the brain like an automobile. For an automobile to function efficiently, the engine, climate control and engine cooling system, transmission, braking system, suspension, axles and driveshafts, wheels and tires, fuel system, steering system, and electrical system must be present and in good working condition, much like our subcortical portion of the brain. But, the cortex of the brain is equivalent to the aesthetic aspect of the automobile. The automobile's body shape and color vary dramatically. Modifications are done to improve performance by playing to the vehicles strengths, by possibly increasing power or enhancing the aerodynamics. We tweak these cosmetic aspects, such as the wheel gap and fitment, because we can. It allows us to customize the automobile to our benefit and likes; we can do the same with our brains. We can improve certain skills, such as memory, attention, and processes; we can even train the mind to think different.

Our brain may appear to have the likeness of an advance machine that modifies itself to fit the individual's needs, but is it the brain or in actuality the Mind? The Mind, or consciousness, is a person's subjective experience of the world and ourselves. Consciousness

involves with the “ever-changing awareness of thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, events, and actions” (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Namy, & Woolf, 2014, p. 170).

My fascination with the concept of self-awareness to the level that humans possess contributed to my idea that a person consists of several spaces at a given time. I loosely categorized the spaces of a person as the following: physical, emotional, and mental.

I chose these because they are where I find myself wondering to the most from my experiences. Since I gain a better understanding of concepts visually, I have included the visuals as part of sharing of my thought process.

Figure 1.1 The Human's Spaces

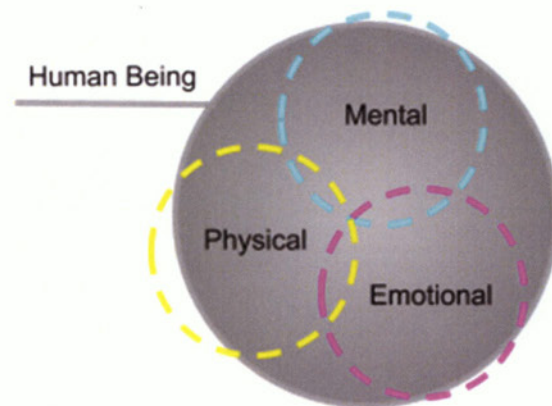


Figure 1.1 The Human's Spaces depicts how I mentally view the influences of these spaces on a human. The person is represented by a gradient of grey circle, meaning there are infinite point of interaction and diversity in thought. While, the 'spaces' have a lined border that allows the flow of information to intermingle with each other. The primary colors of pigment, or subtractive color, (cyan, yellow, and magenta) are signifying that the fundamentals are the key to growing and allows the endless possibility of colors, or opportunities of experiences.

The physical space of a human is our bodies. We share a physical plane of existence that we know as Earth. Our bodies have the capability to interact on this physical level. Our bodies grant us the ability to experience sensation, whether it is with our eyes, ears, skin, nose, or tongue. Our bodies are constantly feeding us these sensations, but we become desensitized. I have to make a conscious effort to notice the sensations at times. So, sometimes I sit and I try to

clear my head, and simply focus on one sense. I used to think the concept as simple, until I tried it and noticed my mind wondering.

There is no such thing as silence. If a person sat in a soundproof room and was still, they would still hear sounds; the body generates sounds. There is the sound of breathing, of the heart pumping blood throughout the body. When the eyes are open, the nose is always in the line of sight. The skin is always in contact with something. I previously did not give it as much thought until as of recent. I can feel the clothes I wear on my skin; I can feel the pressure I put on my feet when I stand; I can feel the tension in my hair when I tie it up; I can feel the weight of the watch on my wrist. All these sensations are always present, which made me realize that perhaps I am not always present in my own body. It is these moments of insight of my person, of my mind, that makes me question what it means to experience life, to find peace in what I do in order to feel as if I am living. When I become aware of my physical space, I am given the opportunity to experience a moment of connectedness, which is the reason of this entire project.

Along with the physical space, emotional space influences our experiences of a location, an event, an action, and other beings. Emotions are mental states or feelings generated from our reactions to our perceptions of an experience (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Namy, & Woolf, 2014, p. 412). I imagine emotions as color tinted glasses. We all have a full set, but we have our preferences and our “favorites” for whatever reason. Sometimes the lens are more transparent and we are able to still see through the emotion, while other times the opaqueness blinds the viewer. When I see my old childhood home in the city, my lens hold some sadness; but as a child living there, I saw mostly through joy. The home I have now, I see appreciation and wonder. The way I feel about a location, a person, or a situation varies at given times because emotions create a certain environment and alter how we may perceive an experience.

The third experience-altering space is mental. However, the label “mental” is too broad.

Figure 1.2 Mental Map of Mental Space depicts, I have further loosely divided mental space into more concise labels. The first division is consciousness and subconsciousness.

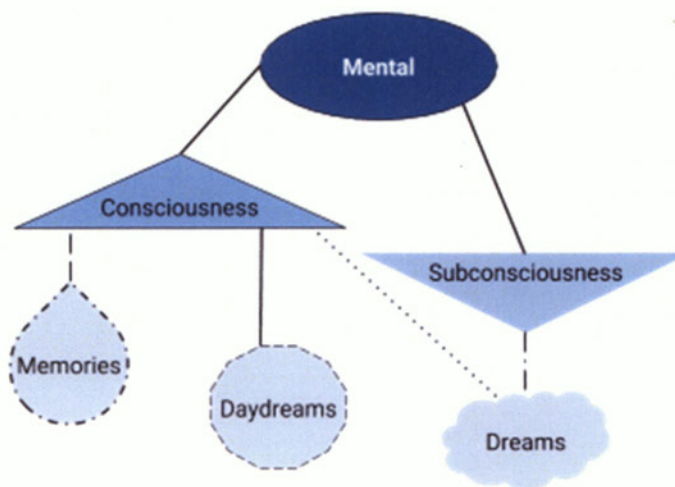
Consciousness is further divided into memories and daydreams. When I reminisce of my past, I am transported to those moments. My physical self may remain, but I sever that connection for the moment in order to focus on the memory.

It had not occurred to me the extent of the separation until I accidentally came across it. While I worked at a camp for children with autism, we would often take them to a park as a reward. One day I felt

compelled to swing on the swing set. I remembered that childish delight of swinging with the hot sun and breeze around you. I remembered my grandmother when she took me to a park and taught me to swing because she would tire of pushing me for so long. When I had that memory, I was no longer in the park that we took the kids from camp; I was in my childhood park swinging with my grandmother. When I traveled to that memory, I was reliving that moment. The present had faded, or perhaps it had simply reverted to that moment. I was there again, until it ended and I was back in my present-day body. I had discovered a new world, in a different dimension in my own mind.

The same could be said of daydreams; however, there is an added component of opportunity and creativity. Humans have the unique ability to mentally travel outside the

Figure 1.2 Mental Map of Mental Space



physical plane of existence and enter a world of their desires, hopes, and fears. Through awareness, humans create a new world, a new existence that they permit to exist. As humans, we craft this secret world in which we are the 'all powerful being' that rules our mental universe. We modify it constantly to fit our personal needs, to whether let it thrive or wither away. I like to think of it as the 'what if' world. It allows me to play out scenarios that are possible, or even better the impossible. Daydreams allow us to be writers or moviemakers, because they are the stories, the ideas of the imaginary 'what if's.

Another space that is truly surreal is the subconsciousness. Although unconscious and subconscious are often used interchangeably, I believe the difference is worthwhile in this instance. The prefix 'un-' means a lack of, while 'sub-' means at a lower level. An argument can be made for the usage of 'unconscious' because it exemplifies the opposite of being conscious; however, the opposite of consciousness can be interpreted as not awake. When I mention the mental spaces, I do not refer to 'sleep,' but rather the "thoughts, actions or brain processes of which a person is not directly aware" (2016). In this world there are several mysterious and the subconscious, I would say, is one of them. How could humans be aware of what they are not aware of? It seems quite contradictory; the only way I can express this space is through the concept of dreams, which again is still a mysterious force, but one that is constantly present in our lives.

As previously seen on Figure 1.2, the space of dreams is connecting to the subconsciousness and consciousness because I believe that dreams act as a gateway between the two. Everyone does dream, but we do not all recall said dreams and we dream differently. I recall mostly emotions and then imagery. I always found it curious that I do not recall colors very often when I do remember a dream; sometimes I am convinced that I did not imagine colors, or better

yet, I contemplate the existence of other colors that my eyes are unable to see, but that my brain may invent. After all, light is a form of electromagnetic energy, “energy composed of fluctuating electric and magnetic waves.” Humans perceive colors because the human eye is sensitive to certain wavelengths, from approximately 400 nanometers to 700 nanometers. This range is known as the human visible spectrum because it is what we can detect with the naked eye (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Namy, & Woolf, 2014, p. 132). I fancy the thought that because we cannot see the other wavelengths it does not necessarily mean they lack color, it may simply mean we lack the capability to experience them. After all, not all humans experience color; those that are blind before the age of four, rarely develop the ability to generate visual imagery, but they still dream. In a study conducted by Dutch researchers in 2014, individuals that had lost their sight early in life reported more auditory, tactile, gustatory, and olfactory components in their dreams (Meaidi, Jennum, Ptito, & Kupers, 2014).

If everyone dreams, why is it that we know so little about the dream realm? We are aware that we dream, but we do not know the exact reason why. Evidence suggest that humans dream to process emotional memories, integrate “new experiences with established memories to make sense of and create a virtual reality model of the world,” learn new strategies and enhance muscle memory, stimulate threatening events so “we can better cope with them in everyday life,” and reorganize and consolidate memories (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Namy, & Woolf, 2014, p. 179). Despite the actual reason humans dream, we still construct this mental space for our benefit.

An understanding of these different spaces that influence human experience is essential to the overall project. This, along with my insight on what defines human experience allows the viewer to better comprehend the process of my visual manifestations of a human’s phenomenology. The viewer is invited to compare said experiences to their own.

Ultimately, the goal is to generate connections. I want to connect. I want others to realize they can connect. I want a shared realization that we are all connected. The human experience goes beyond surface level. My past experiences, my thoughts, my emotions, my beliefs, my views, my victories, my downfalls, my fears, my doubts, my desires, my aspirations, my hopes, my very being are not always on a pedestal to be displayed. To be able to hide certain aspects of my being grants me a freedom that at times is especially blissful. Through this blissful freedom, I am free to be more than my faults and move beyond the scars that mar my soul and prevent me from becoming the person I aspire to be.

Thus, leading me to believe that humanness embraces more than the personas we craft. I understand that to obtain my goal of generating deeper connection, I may have to be vulnerable, so that others may see the hidden aspects of my humanness. To share the unseen is terrifying because I see my fears, my doubts, my downfalls as these grotesques, monstrous entities that plague me, but only in private. But, they are a part of me as a human, and most likely a part of others' humanness as well. In order to achieve my main objective of connecting with others, I devised a public viewing for the artwork created for this project.

I have created twenty visual manifestations using a variety of art mediums that portray the human experience at different stages of life. Some of the following pieces are more age specific, while others are situations or emotions that may occur throughout a person's life. Since I applied my own experiences, I do realize that not everyone has had all the same experiences as I have. But since it is artwork, the viewer has the freedom to interpret the works in order to connect to the degree they wish. I believe that the artist's intent is not always what the viewer gains from a work of art, but rather the viewer gains what they need personally from the work itself.

Person = Place

The first piece of work was the result of the original idea that a person is a place; the concept that inspired the creation of this show. I wanted to create a visual representation of myself during that moment in time; therefore, I included beliefs, thoughts, and real-time experiences I was having.

I traced my own body on paper, which I selectively used black and white to represent what I saw as darkness and purity within me. I used a multitude of mediums to represent the fact that as individuals we are made of several different aspects. Some of the writings within the piece are quotes, while others are thoughts. The smaller drawing are visualizations of concepts or a reminder of an event, such as the Buddha.

I was in search of a quiet place in order to escape the rest of the world for a moment and I ironically found myself in front of a statue of Buddha. A wonderful human introduced me to the concept of Zen through Suzuki's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (1999). His informal talks influenced the idea of the nowness, or the moment, that contributes to our humanness; with focusing on a moment, we are clearing our mind of all the chaos and experience a connected living.

To emphasize the experience of the moment, I drew a frog using a stippling technique. When an individual takes the time to see the drawing, they will find it composed of several dots. With a glance the magic is lost, but to willingly share a moment to genuinely see allows the viewer to transform the situation and witness the beauty even in the mundane.

The piece is only a small glimpse of a person, but it acknowledges that a person is diverse in being and has a different perspective to offer to our experience as interconnected human experience.



Figure 1.3 Person = Place

Mixed media on Paper; 99 x 83 cm (39 x 32 ⁹/₁₆ in.)

All the Fluff

The following piece is a construction of different aspects that constitutes as early childhood experiences. The ideal childhood is filled with colorfulness and life because a child is considered a miracle.

Individuals do not remember their early years because the brain is still in the process of developing. Learning creates new neurological connections, which in turn, allows more capabilities for more complex learning. These connections are building an understanding of the world. Mental development often correlates with motor development. Children take their first steps approximately during their first meaningful word. The older the child, the more developed they are to communicate.

When children are born, they enter a new existence, a new environment with more offerings. Everything they experienced inside the womb has dramatically changed and they are subjected to new stimuli. This piece is meant to emphasize the growth of those years and what we are exposed to. I incorporated a motif of personal clothing that represents a certain aspect of humanness. In this construction I included the hospital shirt that was given to me when I was born. The clothing is petite, a soft pinkness in color, and it is placed on a stuffed animal toy representing further the cuteness and fragility of a newborn.

However, the child grows within this little world I have created. The child experiments with toys, which are essential in the learning of new skills. Coloring promotes fine motor skills as well as hand eye coordination. Reading signifies that the child has the mental development to understand and read language. Dolls allow the practice of pragmatics, or the social aspects of language and communication. The human brain has evolved, so that the individual is able to more efficiently use communication to create connections with others.



Figure 1.4 All the Fluff

Construction of mix media; 40.6 x 243.8 x 149.8 cm (16 x 96 x 59 in)

Childhood, with a Hint of Adulthood

This balancing sculpture is inspired by another piece of art I created in 2002. As a child, my mother let me paint my wooden chair as I pleased. The base color is white that has begun to fade with scratches that expose the wood, while bright flowers and colorful blobs are scattered throughout. I remember the making of this chair, which reflects the aspects of late childhood: personal choices that allow us to grow.

We grow into our personalities with our interests and chose activities that are pleasing to us and fill a certain need we possess. Late childhood is what we remember and this sculpture embodies some of my experiences of that time. Some of the elements were easy to incorporate, while others more difficult since they represent more than the object. I divided the sculpture into two portions: childhood and adulthood, though the eyes of a child. Both are composed of items that represent the actual item, the activity, or an experience I have associated with it.

Childhood is partly designed as a mobile to represent the growth from crib to adult. The wooden stand also demonstrates this with the marking of a child recording their height every year. I have incorporated objects, such as roller coasters, dinosaurs, pets, family, travels, holiday traditions, space, and an oversized lollipop. I consider it fairly whimsical because of a child's imagination converts the ordinary into something exceptional; I demonstrate this concept in my sculpture by added elements, such as a bathtub that is a pirate ship.

The adulthood portion is purposely created smaller and place further back to represent the fact that children may think of adulthood, but it does not dominate their focus. Some items only adult can own, such as a car or the use of cosmetics. The realizations that there are different kinds of love exist and the possibility of having a life partner. The freedoms to travel, to grow as a person, to be immersed in culture and spirituality. Our personal world grows much larger.



Figure 1.5 Childhood, with a Hint of Adulthood

Construction of mix media; 162.5 x 73.6 x 138.5 cm (64 x 29 x 54 1/2 in.)



Figure 1.6a Childhood



Figure 1.6b Adulthood

Imagination

I literally fabricated a dog out of colorful wooden shapes. Perhaps the interpretation is more abstract, but that is the purpose of this sculpture. A quality I greatly associate with childhood is imagination. Since I was a child, the idea of having a dog always appealed to me. I was fortunate to own other pets, but they were often confined in shells or water tanks.

This piece allowed me to bring to life an old wish with a bit of imagination. I arranged the colorful blocks in a manner that created a balancing sculpture. I saw this sculpture as an opportunity to play and experiment. I even chose for the head a block that had a ring to represent an eye. I wanted the viewers to also experience the childish liberation of creating, so I incorporated an interactive component.

Available were more blocks of varying shapes and colors shown in **Figure 1.6**. I used both primary and secondary colors to represent the idea of modifying the bare essentials to encourage innovation. Art possesses several functions. In some pieces the importance is not about the end results, but rather the process in the creation.

Surprisingly, Imagination was inspired by an Abstract Expressionist named Jackson Pollock. In the late 1940s, Pollock started a new technique of painting by “dripping, pouring, and splashing paint onto large-scale canvases” (2009). His pieces are very energetic and slightly overwhelming by the sheer size of them. But, I am not amazed by his final creations.

His process is what I find captivating; its evidence is smearing onto the canvas. I relish in the thought of the playfulness in the creation of his piece. As an individual who likes to explore with different art mediums, I realize each medium has its own process and his method inspires in me a playful to create. The process is a gratifying experience in the creation of anything. The final product is a reminder of the process and its ability to possess meaning.

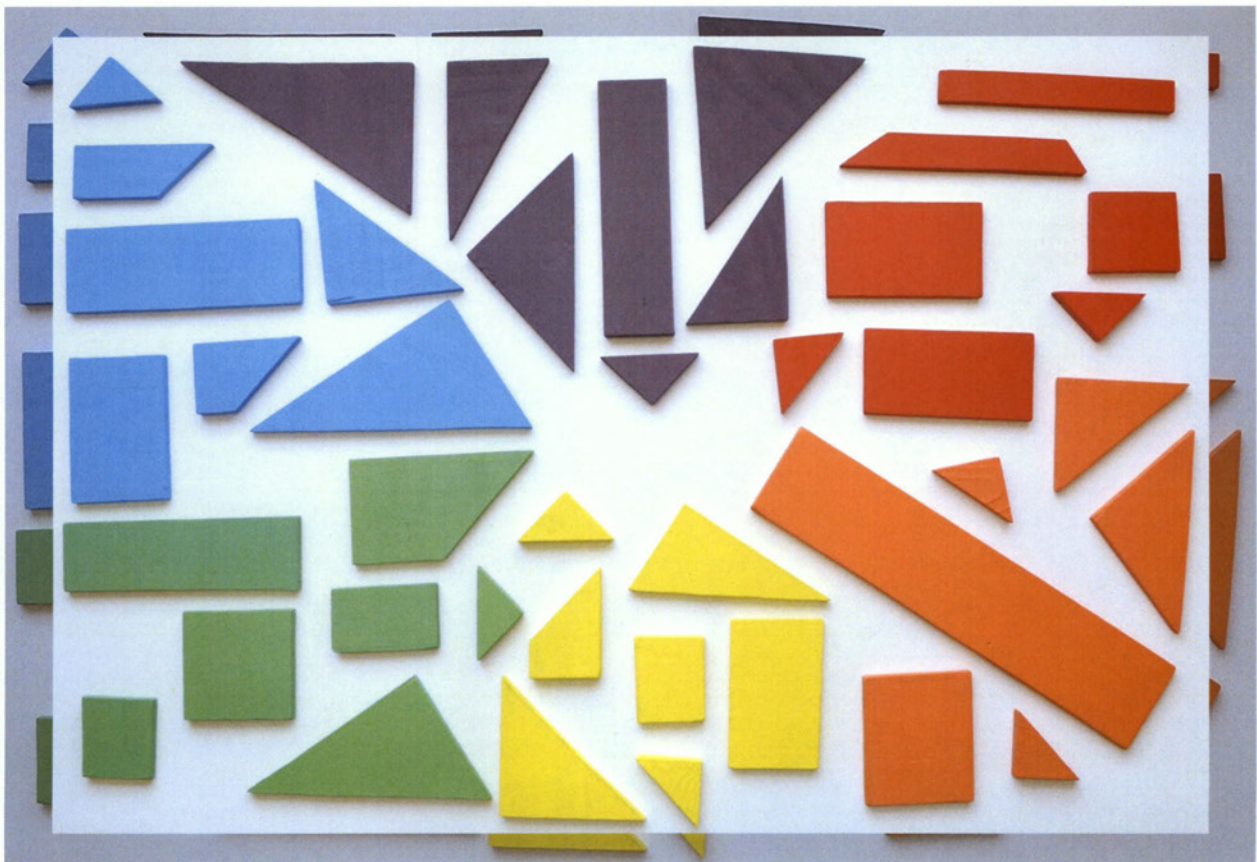


Figure 1.6 Colored Blocks

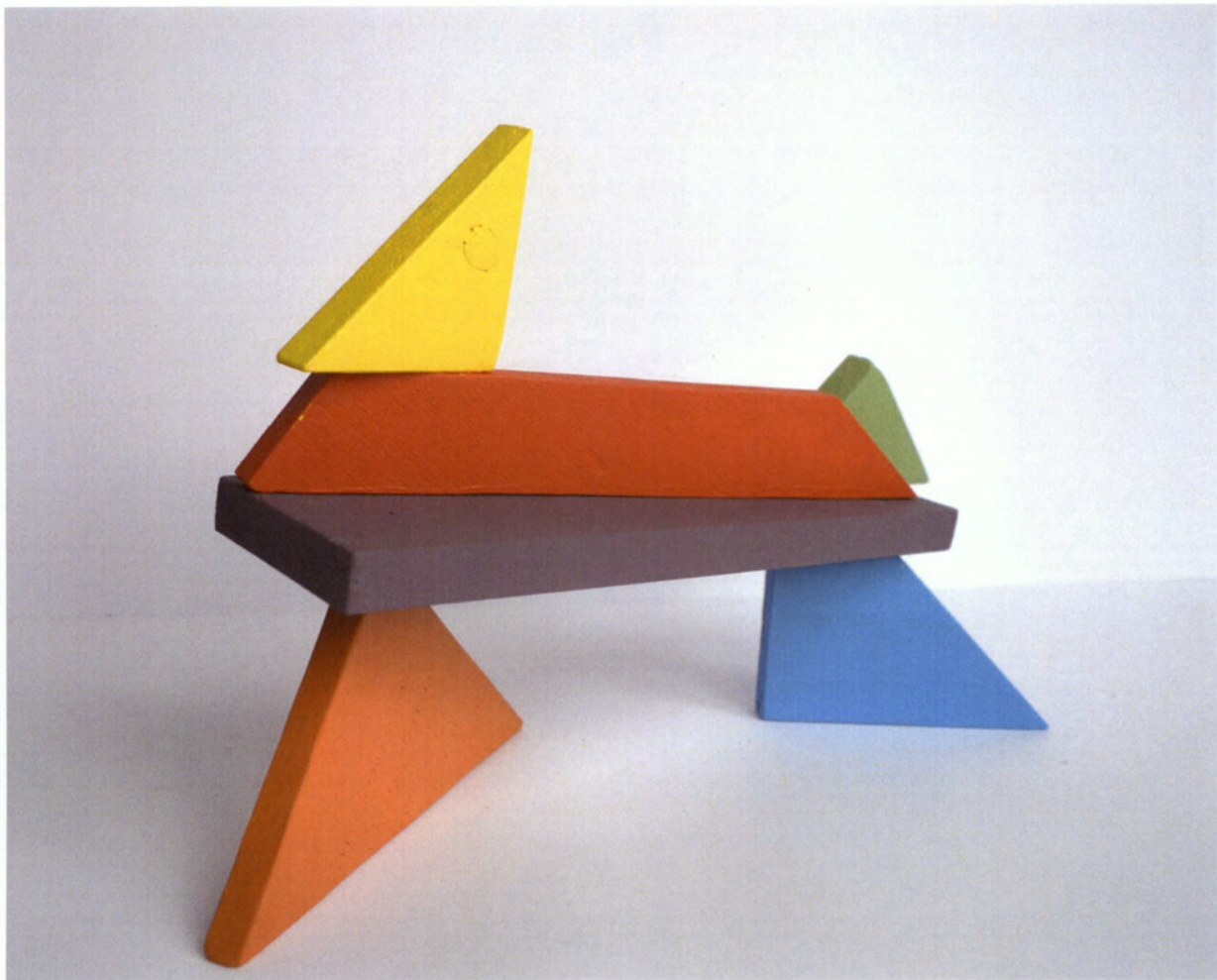


Figure 1.7 Imagination

Acrylic and Wood Sculpture; 26 x 41.5 x 20.3 cm (10 x 16 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 8 in.)

Girl Named Sky

The “Girl Named Sky” portrays a child blowing bubbles, but most importantly she portrays the opportunity for the viewer to participate in this piece. I welcome the audience to contribute by adding a small drawing or writing representing a certain aspect of their childhood and using them as the bubbles being blown. They are gifting others with their experiences; they are creating opportunities to connect.

The style of the piece is inspired by Banksy. He is an anonymous, world-traveling urban artist, using his art as a form of activism (Ellsworth-Jones, 2013). His work is usually done in a grayscale and designed with whimsical wit that promotes some sort of awareness.

This piece possesses several personal connections. One connection is that it contains a rendering of home. To create the brick, I did a rubbing of the actual bricks of one of my childhood homes. This technique was inspired by an exhibit in the Art Institute, called *Mirroring China’s Past: Emperors and Their Bronze*. Many scholars documented ancient bronze vessels used for rituals by covering the vessel with lightweight paper and used ink to capture the designs (1871). This technique allowed me to document a specific place that holds memories of childhood. I feel this fact is lost to the viewer, but as the creator I was pleased and felt more connected to this piece overall.

The child was designed with toddlers as inspiration. Because during these years, toddlers’ speech intelligibility increases to 50 to 75%. They are more aware of others, while still developing their character and personalities (Lanza & Flahive, 2008).

I continued the motif of clothing; the character is wearing a piece of clothing I wore as a small child, another personal connection. The dress is light in color with pinkish and yellow flowers scattered throughout; I feel that it portrays the childhood innocence and liveliness.



Figure 1.8 Girl Named Sky

Ink, Acrylic, Conte Crayon, and Fabric on Paper and Cardboard; 98 x 77 cm (38 1/2 x 28 in.)

Endeavor to Acceptance

The human experience constitutes journeys. Our personal endeavors are lessons and achievements. One of my endeavors was religion; I was born into a specific religion that as I grew I could no longer connect with. My beliefs were contradicting with other aspects of myself and I lost the sense of peace it once brought me. So, I left. I still hold respect towards religion because I believe it can offer a special beauty. I just want to explore otherness. I felt like I was abandoning not only my parents whom still had strong faiths, but also my heritage. Our roots are important, but they do not dictate one's entire being. I am my own person and I deal with my own emotions and consequences. To have a more fulfilling life, I believe a bit of selfishness is necessary to fill one's personal needs.

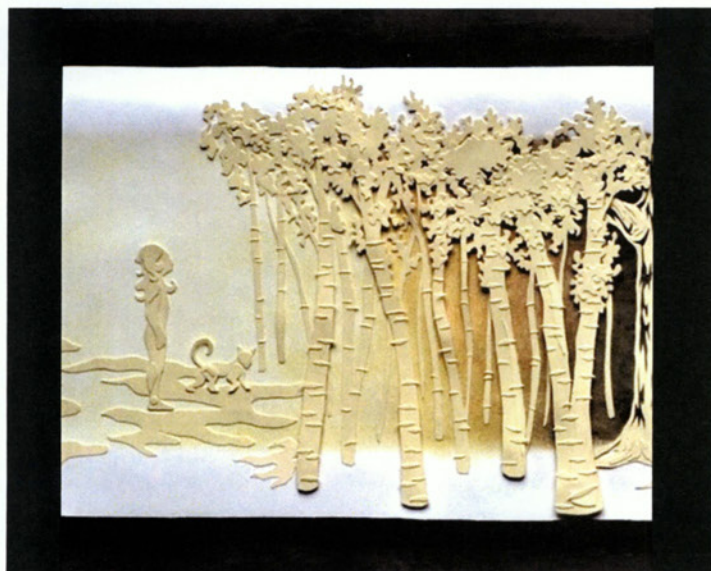
My piece was created in five scenes to tell the story of a journey. For whatever journey, we start in a state of unaware, of content, such as the scene of the left of Figure 1.9. But a change occurs causes us to see the situation differently and grow curious; we become the individual looking into the forest. Our realities may shift which can cause grievance because we resist the changes that are inevitable; welcome to the weeping willow scene. However, the manner in which we handle the situation can become stepping stones for growth; we become stronger and, like scene four, climb out of the situation. We grow confidence to move forward towards accepting the path we chose: our liberation.

But, the fifth scene may not be the final scene. For some, the acceptance is the end to the story; while for others, it lands us into a new situation, creating a cycle. It was important to create this piece with recycled materials to emphasize repurposing for new meaningfulness. A journey may never truly end if one looks at it from a different perspective, it simply becomes another.



Figure 1.9 Endeavor to Acceptance

Watercolor and Paper; 30.4 x 127 cm (12 x 50 in.)



Figures 1.9a Content (Top)

Figure 1.9b Curiosity (Left)

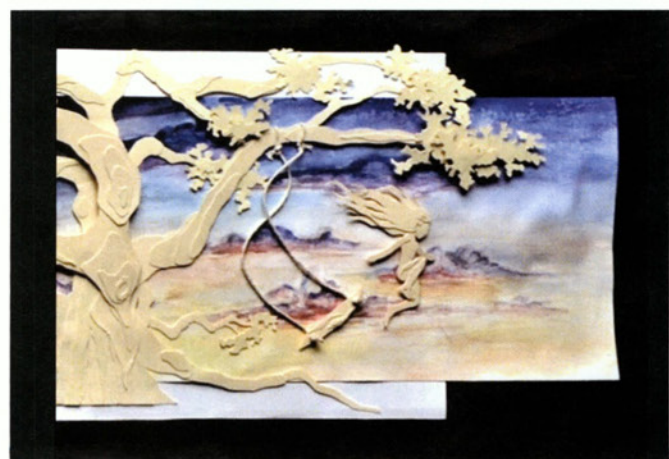


Figure 1.9c Resistance

Figure 1.9d Growth

Figure 1.9e Liberation

(From top to bottom)



Mind & Heart Meet

A complicated aspect of being human is being able to feel and to know, and having them not coordinate. I have had several situations in which I experience is dilemma of contradiction. When they are at odds, I am hesitant to follow any course of action because both sides are valid. Or perhaps my values are in a constant state of shifting, and my priorities shift along with them.

My sculpture displays the connectiveness of the mind and emotions through a representation of the brain and heart. The brain portion is inspired by the anatomy of a human brain along with some of its functions. The brain is divided into two hemispheres and are connected at one point, like a brain's corpus callosum. The wires vary in color to represent the neurological pathways. The left hemisphere is considered analytical, practical, and logical. The beads are used are meant to emphasize these characteristics. The red wire only has the white beads in groups of one. The purple wire has circular black beads in groups of three. The blue wire has purple squares in groups of four. However, the right side is a mishmash of different kinds of beads with different designs, shapes, and textures to emphasize creativity, senses, and my culture. I have included five figurines of elephants to represent my immediate family. I included flowers and colorful skeletons to represent my Mexican culture.

The brainstem branches downwards and spreads more of the nerves outward and to the heart. The heart is more abstract because although emotions are processes in the brain, we associate them with the heart. Blood is bluish in nature when it lacks oxygen, which inspired the color of the wax. This heart represents a heart that is full of experiences. It possesses cracks and patches. But despite the damage, it represents itself as a strong heart because it is still living. It stitches itself together and builds more layers to increase its strength, so it can continue moving forwards because it has more to experience.



Figure 1.10 Mind & Heart Meet

Wire, Beads, and Wax Sculpture; 41 x 22 x 18 cm ($16 \frac{3}{16} \times 8 \frac{11}{16} \times 7 \frac{3}{16}$ in.)

Pessimist's Worst Nightmare

This piece is strange, perhaps slightly disturbing, but despair is an agonizing experience. We become these disconcerting beings that are not always functional or logical. We become alternate versions of ourselves that no one wants to experience willingly. No one wants hardships, to experience lava for blood, to understand the drowning sensation, have panic attacks that feel like heart attacks, or the inhibitions preventing the ability to "just do" something. No one wants to know the pain one's mind tricks the body into believing it is in.

This piece embodies all that ugliness. She is unable to stand, literally collapsing into herself. She is left raw and exposed with just the wire to show. She feels as if she is barely being held together. She is miserable. She is Misery. She experiences a pessimist's worst nightmare: the fear that the wrongness is actually occurring and no being able to prevent it. She hurts from feeling so much, but fears the emptiness more than anything because the emptiness is an abyss that is not easily escapable.

My sculpture is inspired by Auguste Rodin's bronze sculpture called Adam. Rodin portrays Adam and Eve's suffering caused by the original sin. He studied the works of past Italian masters, such as Michelangelo, as inspiration for his series called *The Gates of Hell* (2009). I incorporated the downward facing head and collapsing body into my sculpture. Her mind and heart so heavy that her body is barely supporting her. I did not cover her fully in wire to emphasize her feeling of being raw and exposed. Her once bright exterior has turned black because she feels like a shadow of the essence she once was. In *Art as Therapy*, they mention sublimation as a psychological process of transformation of base experiences into something of worth (Botton & Armstrong, 2013). This piece, I believe, features the ugliness we all experience within ourselves and allows its existence to be acknowledged.



Figure 1.11 Pessimist's Worst Nightmare

Enamel and Wire Sculpture; 57.2 x 104.2 x 84 cm (22 ½ x 41 x 33 ⅛ in.)

Pain

My drawing, Pain, was a stepping stone to letting go of control, which was very difficult for me. I did not plan the final product as I do with most pieces. I typically have a vision or at least a general concept of how I want to construct a piece. But not with Pain. I allowed my emotion to dictate, which was surprisingly a terrifying experience. Since I had no direction, I found myself feeling silly and insecure. At first, I made only shapes and I thought how ridiculously immature it appeared. But then I made associations with what I was seeing to my experience of pain, and the pastels became the language of the conversation I was having with this drawing.

The story created in the process was one of pain and grief. As I stare at this piece, I see an individual spiraling into themselves, being engulfed in darkness, in the hurt. But feebly still trying to reach for the light because the light is hope. The water is tears, but also signify life. Although water holds no nutrient value, it is necessary to maintain the body in a productive and healthy state of homeostasis. I created ripples because pain is a disturbance on our life and possesses a lingering effect, but even ripples eventually die down. The waves are signifying the sense of overwhelmness, being tossed in one direction and suddenly in another creating disorientation and powerless. The black lines, or the unwelcomed situations, are being intrusive to the overall piece. Those black lines are interrupting the cycle of life and tainting our human experience. They hold no consideration to how they affect the individual.

In the past few years, I have been exposed to some terrible experiences. When an individual is given more freedom, more risk is involved. Despite the hurt, I cannot wish them into nothingness because they offered me understanding, strength, and courage to take more risks because I already know I can survive them.



Figure 1.12 Pain

Marker and Oil Pastels on Paper; 128.8 x 106.6 cm (50 $\frac{11}{16}$ x 42 in.)

Hidden wounds, or “I’m fine.”

This is by far the hardest to share. These are vulnerable moments, but I felt it necessary to still share to demonstrate another aspect of human experience. The vulnerability, exasperation, anger, hurt, and the defeat.

I have dermatographism, meaning a pressure or even a light scratch easily marks my skin. I used this to my advantage for the concept of displaying something unseen. We all have ordeals and lessons that remain with us for a reason. Sometimes they are maddening. Sometimes they are painful. Sometimes we want to hide them, so that others do not witness them.

As a society, I feel that we conceal negative emotions and experiences for various reasons. Perhaps because of shame for having weakness, being perceived as a burden, or fracturing the persona we create for others. For whatever reason, it is not mentioned and people are suffering alone because we assume that the smiling person next to us is having a wonderful life when in reality they are also facing difficult situations and suffering in some way, but concealing it with a smile.

This series of four represents the experience of a private moment in which the individual is no longer able to conceal the negative emotions and is forced to experience them in whatever manner to feel free of them. The first is hiding the pain in darkness, trying to be functional despite all the chaotic internal mess. The next image down is of overwhelmness, the frustration and anger of the situation, but not knowing how to solve it. Finally feeling the maddening waves of emotions and drowning in them. The third is the representation of what those negative emotions and situations do to our souls: damaging our human essence. The bottommost image is the shame of succumbing to the negative, the sense of self-preservation, but the overall sensation of defeat that makes them feel as if their being, their essence, is fading a little at a time.



Figure 1.13a Vulnerability

Photography



Figure 1.13b Exasperation

Photography

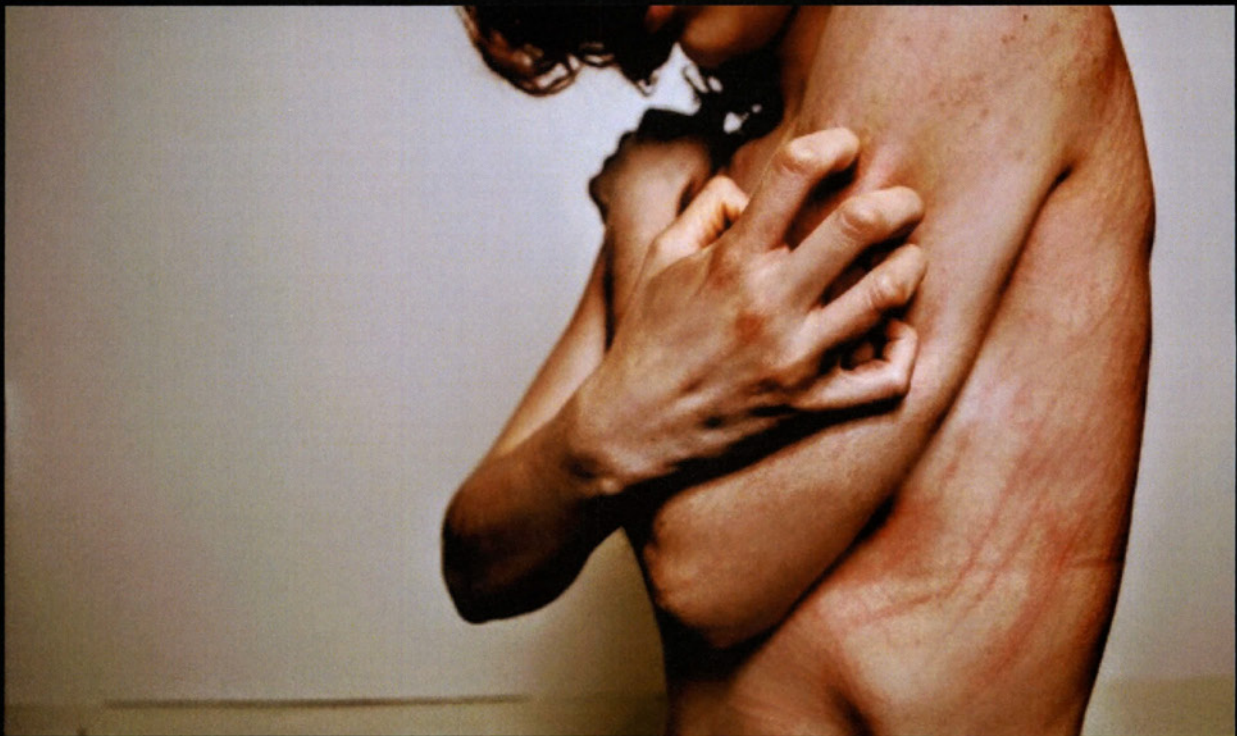


Figure 1.13c Hurt

Photography



Figure 1.13d Defeat

Photography

Perseverance

Perseverance is a quality that I consider valuable. The hardships can break an individual or strengthen them. I wanted to demonstrate in this drawing that life is a cycle. This cycle is meant to represent more than a life cycle; I used a flower as a metaphor for a human being.

When we are born, we are naïve little beings. But with time and experiences, we are nourished and become wiser, so we grow stronger and bolder. Along the journey, we may get trampled, may feel used, and may experience situations out of our control. But through perseverance, we learn and modify aspects of our life in order to create the path that may lead us to our ideal way of living. Eventually, the hardships pass and we are born again as stronger beings. We learn that our strength is greater than a situation if it rises again.

The most important aspect is believing in our strength because that hope alone gives us more strength to face the obstacles. I have had to endure situations in which I felt my strength was snatched from me and because I believed that, I felt powerless. The situations had ripped off all my leaves and petals. I felt as if I was left with nothing, but confusion and disappointment for letting it happen.

And yet, I survived. I may not be as naive of certain situations any longer, but I can use my knowledge gained from those situations to contribute to the world around me. We all face some difficult hardships, which means none of us are truly alone the pain and confusion that we may feel. I wish no heaviness of mind or heart on others. I wanted to create a reminder, for myself and others, that we all possess an inner strength. Even when we do not feel connected to it, the strength does still exist.

This piece is created monochromatically to emphasize that we do not simply have or not have strength, but instead reflect the different intensities of inner strength we may experience.

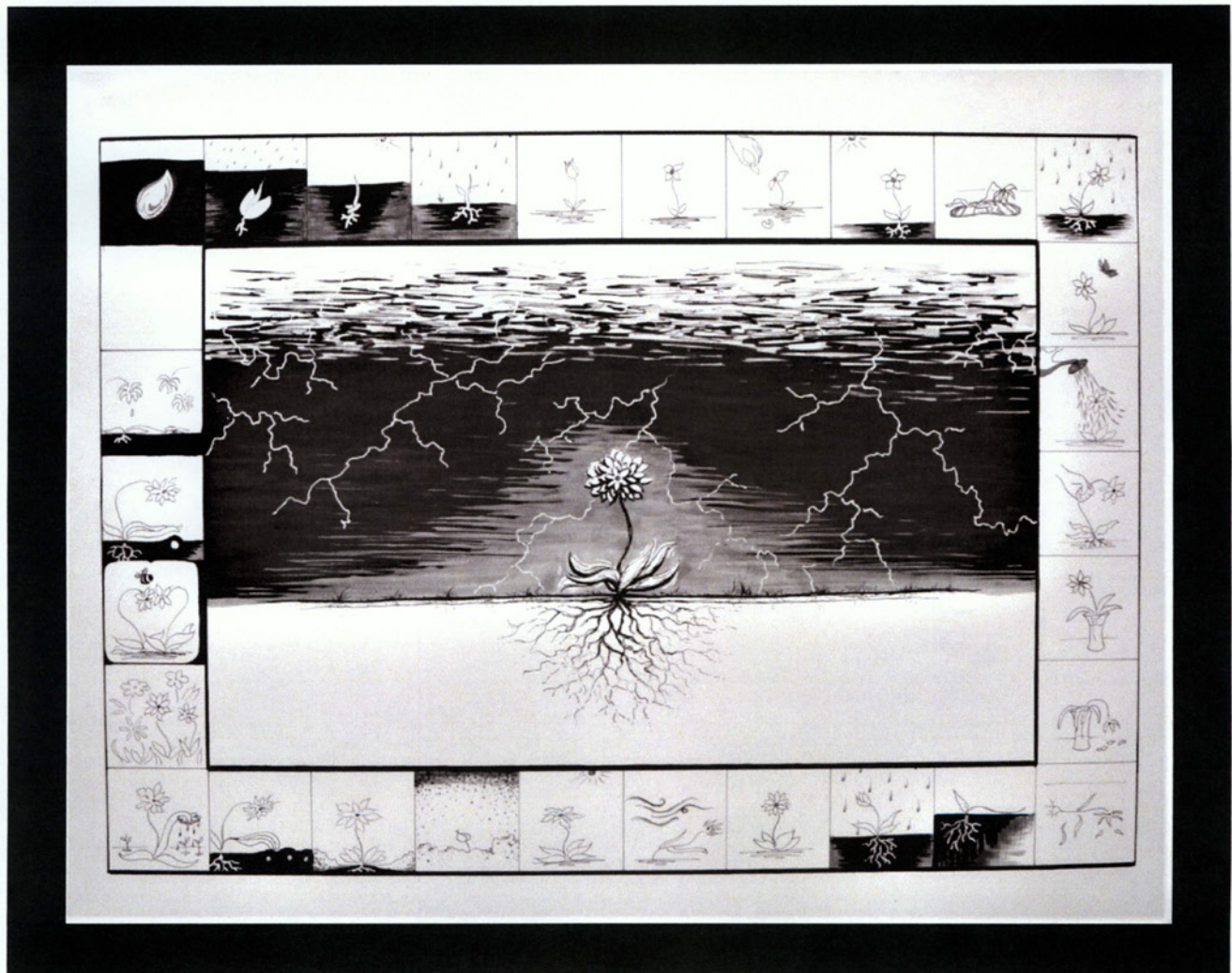


Figure 1.14 Perseverance

Ink and Marker on Paper; 35.6 x 43.2 cm (14 x 17 in.)

Boundaries

I feel children lack boundaries because they have yet to learn all the social rules. As one matures, I think we learn from experiences and create boundaries in order to protect ourselves, much like a defense mechanism. But any defense mechanism can become a hindrance when abused. Excessive amounts can cause isolation, depriving humans of being able to create meaningful experiences and connections with others.

I acknowledge my own boundaries and I consider it a bit saddening because I first handedly experience the effects of the excessive limitations with my relation to others. The frustration but hesitation to connect can be confusing. The need to connect and the need to protect oneself from unnecessary pain rival.

This painting is the depiction of an individual working through their boundaries to allow the essence of whom they are to reach the outside world, so that they may reconnect. They chance the risk of unpleasant experiences in order to gain validation through human connection because existing in an isolated world is not genuinely living.

The center of the painting is the individual, and the painted strings are the many elements of a person's being: their humanness. The boundaries are constructed with wire; these walls are meant to look like foreign obstacles in this organic landscape. They interrupt the flow of energy that we, as living beings, thrive on.

The boundaries create mazes, so the individual, wanting to escape, is still unable to find the openings. Perhaps the maze is the subconscious responding to the threat of being exposed to the unknown. When we are in the maze, we are attempting to connect, but might not understand all the social rules, and therefore, still experience the feel of disconnect. However, when others are authentically willing to connect, they give us the courage to climb over the boundaries.



Figure 1.15 Boundaries

Acrylic, String, and Wire on Canvas; 45 x 50.8 cm (16 x 20 in.)

Modern Day Apocalypse

This painting was my response to political events that have been occurring for the past few years. In the election of 2016, I witnessed a true fear some individuals had of what the future was going to consist of for certain groups. In sharing thoughts, concerns, and fear, I saw solidarity form among groups. If that solidarity and support can be extended not only within the group, but grow to include other groups, then perhaps more unity can exist. A unity front can achieve the unexpected through compassion.

My painting is inspired by a story in the Book of Revelations known as the Apocalypse (6:1-8). On judgement day, the four horsemen would rampage through the earth exerting their verdict on the humans. My painting contains the four horsemen: Death, War, Conquest, and Famine (from left to right). Each character and their horses were carefully designed to embody the essence of their label.

Death is inspired by Neil Gaiman's character Death from a graphic novel series (1997). She possesses an air of mild curiosity towards the children because she comprehends the transitory human affairs, but has noticed a change coming. Her horse is a skeleton looking only towards the heavens because of the association that our loved ones are looking down on us from heaven. War is a strong Spartan-influenced female warrior that craves chaos and her scars are the reminders of her victories; she is eager for the bloodshed. Her horse is in amour ready for any conflict. Conquest, or sometimes known as Pestilence, is a politician. He scorns at the children for interfering, or having him and his horse pause on this journey to their self-proclaimed righteousness. Famine is inspired by petrified wood because the substance was once alive, but has fossilized and although it exists, it is no longer living (King). The children represent hope and unity, signifying that they alone have the capability to prevent the impending travesty.



Figure 1.16 Modern Day Apocalypse

Ink, Coffee, and Watercolor on Paper; 81.3 x 43.6 cm (32 x 17 ³/₁₆ in.)

Hope

Hope is a miraculous experience that gives humans a sense of peace because we believe that our desired outcomes can actually transpire. With hope, humans experience a more positive attitude because how could they not feel delight knowing something wonderful may occur?

This painting is the realization of hope existing. The viewer is surrounded by branches stumbling through the darkness until they see light. Hope becomes a guiding essence that lightens our footsteps along with our concerns and fears. When hope blossoms, opportunities seem more plentiful and our lives feel more enriched by the possibilities presented.

Although I think hope is a beautiful gift we can choose, at times a nugget of doubt comes with it. One is so blinded by the light of hope that sometimes they miss the shadow of doubt. Doubt is the fact that hope is a probability and not a guarantee.

The viewer's state of mind can change the whole perceptive of the paint. I see three scenarios: the first, the viewer has found hope and is moving towards it to embrace; the second, the viewer is at a stand-off, staring at hope, not allowing the self to believe in its possibilities; and the third, the viewer is relinquishing hope, returning to the darkness because they can no longer bear the brightness it possesses.

Because its importance is regarding the emotion, the painting is an Romantic inspired piece. Romanticism is an art movement that rejected the ideology of the Enlightenment, only reason could perfect a human, and instead embraces the subjectivity of all things emotional and spiritual (Janson & Janson, 1995). Romanticism appeals to the emotional space of humanness. Romantic artists often found inspiration from nature because its immensity provoked the thought of humans' transitory nature (Little, 2005). The painting's small blooms represent the shortness and longevity of life.



Figure 1.17 Hope

Tea, Ink, Watercolor on Paper; 118 x 106.6 cm (46 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 42 in.)

Chameleon

This mask is the representation of the conflict within myself regarding how I want to be viewed by others and myself. I consider myself a very colorful person, perhaps a bit tainted, but it only adds more shades to my colors. I purposely used a variety of color in the painting of the mask for that reason. Since I feel that the boundaries I create prevent others from seeing my humanness, the mask lacks any opening to physically see through it.

I am the chameleon. I change who I am in certain situations in order to find a niche. Occasionally, I allow myself to blend into the colors of my surroundings to experience acceptance. But in doing so, I feel my individuality compromised. I demonstrated this concept through the transitioning colors of the chameleon to match that of the wood and moss.

These creatures have the astonishing power to constantly change. A concept that befuddles me when applied to humans because at times I am convinced humans have fixed personalities, and yet it is contradicted because we create personas. In the documentary, *Jim & Andy: The Great Beyond*, Carrey blurred the line of acting and being. Carrey had immersed himself so deeply into the character of Andy Kaufman that he became Kaufman to such an extent that Kaufman's family had felt like he had returned to them (Smith, 2017). Is Jim Carrey still Jim Carrey if everything that constitutes as Jim Carrey is gone?

Do I exist in a moment and shift, or is it an evolution based on all the past personas? Regardless, both imply a change of some sort that influences. 'Tomorrow' me does not exist yet, so my focus is directed to the 'moment' me. As a human I want my unique self to be validated, perhaps because I am self-conscious in my shared environment. The fear of not being accepted influences my ability to accept my person and allowing myself to be as I am, whoever that may be at a moment in time.



Figure 1.18 Chameleon

Acrylic on Ceramic; 38.4 x 28.5 x 9.5 cm ($15 \frac{3}{16}$ x $11 \frac{1}{4}$ x $3 \frac{3}{4}$ in.)

Home. Visited. Plan.

This piece is a simplified visual of the physical spaces I have been to and the unyielding desire to visit more of the world to not only connect, but to gain understanding. All these places have cultures that can offer beauty if we are willing to explore.

The red 'x' represents my home. My family may be from another country, but I have lived and interacted more in the Chicago area than anywhere else. I am proud of my heritage and culture, but I have had the wonderful opportunity to be exposed to another culture that has the beauty of containing a small taste of other cultures. I have weathered the map because I believe that a map should tell a tale of the places it has been to, which is the reason I drew small depiction of certain places that left me with tremendous impacts.

I drew the Sears tower for the icon it is and more buildings and a bridge to represent the connections of cultures. The temple of Kukulcan in Chichen Itza and other ruins are a homage to my culture. The remembrance of our roots aids in the molding of our beings. I drew the Santiago de Compostela Cathedral in Spain as a portrayal to the kindness I found during my pilgrimage; the amazement I felt when I witnessed the kindness that strangers had for other strangers has not left me. I drew the Grand Canyon because seeing all the stars in the desert made me aware of how small I am in the universe and it was a humbling experience. I also included the Niagara Falls from Canada with a depiction of a special individual because it was the first time I went on a spontaneous adventure; we packed our bags and took off on a road trip to Canada for a punk festival, and it has been one of the best bonding experience I have ever had with my older brother. This map is not only the places I have been or wish to know, but also a reminder of the lessons I have learned from experiences I shared with others in moment of humanness.



Figure 1.19 Home. Visited. Plan.

Paint, Ink, Watercolor, Coffee on Paper; 49.3 x 68.8 cm (19 1/2 x 27 1/8 in.)

Family and Personal Growth

Family should be a support system that allows individuals to grow with guidance. When I say family, it does not necessarily mean blood relatives. I have another branch of blood relatives that I have never shared a meaningful moment with. They know nothing of my person, of my life. But then I have individuals like my best friend, whom I have known for seventeen years. I consider her family.

Family and culture help mold us to become our individual selves. This piece is a wire sculpture of three elephants. One adult elephant is made of just wire. The baby elephant, or calf, is able to attach to the adult elephant signifying the bond between them. They are made of the same material, sharing a likeness. But if the viewer looks closely, they may notice that the styles for their build are slightly different. They are after all individuals.

We learn from our families and they help shape us with their knowledge of past experiences. We have the freedom, however, to take their lessons as truth or question them because we have our own experiences building and lessons we gain from said experiences. We are molding our individual selves.

Which leads to the second adult elephant, also made with the wire as the others, but with the additions of colored wire and glass beads. This adult elephant symbolizes the calf in a matured state, in which they have accepted the differences. The elephant has cultivated them and celebrates them proudly because that specific uniqueness is something only they can offer. Our differences are presents that we can either accept and benefit from them or we can reject them. But to reject them means we believe they hold no value, which is saddening because it is abandoning an aspect of one's humanness. It is just as important to be kind to oneself as to others.

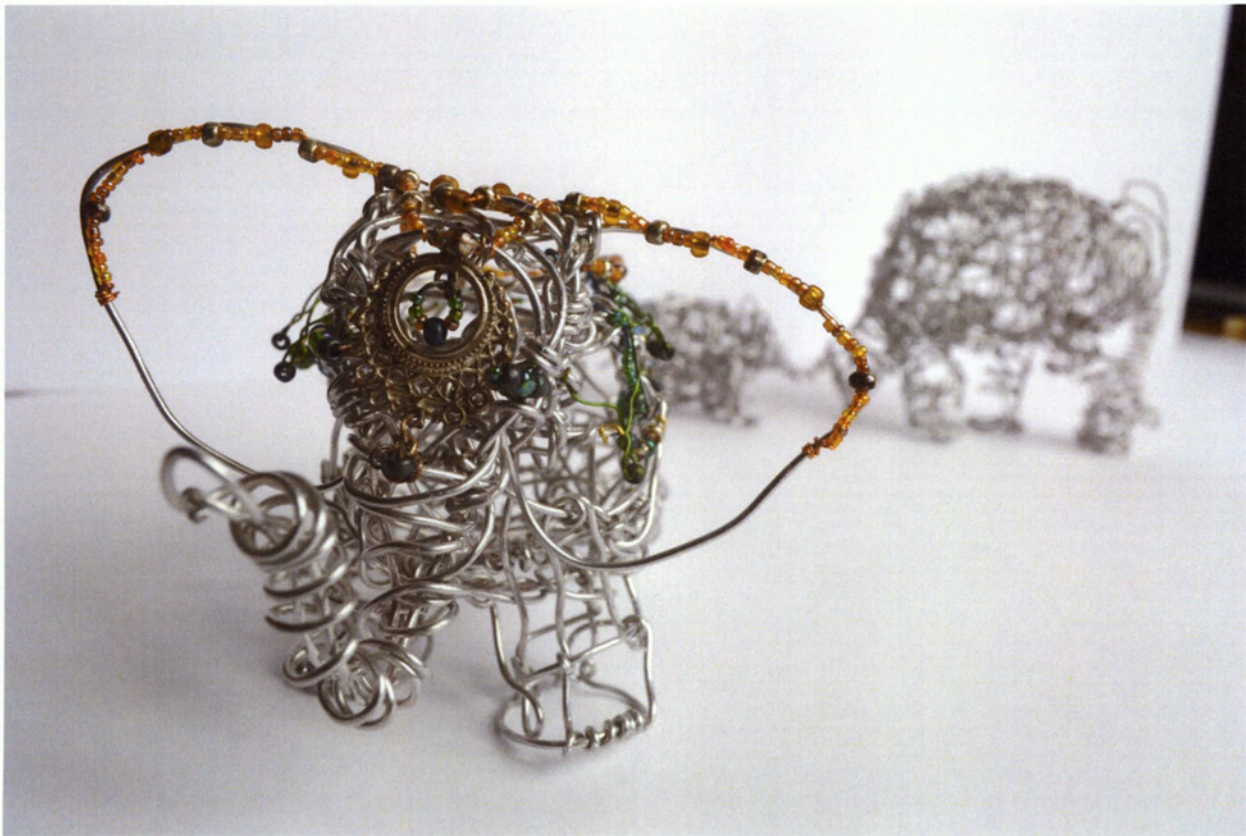


Figure 1.20 Family and Personal Growth

Wire and Beads Three-piece Arrangement

Adult Elephant	13 x 14 x 16.2 cm ($5 \frac{1}{8}$ x $5 \frac{1}{2}$ x $6 \frac{9}{16}$ in.)
Calf	5.5 x 7.5 x 11.4 cm ($2 \frac{1}{4}$ x 3 x $4 \frac{1}{2}$ in.)
Colorful Elephant	11 x 13 x 19 cm ($4 \frac{9}{16}$ x $5 \frac{6}{16}$ x $7 \frac{6}{16}$ in.)

Loving Oneself

Sometimes, I think it is simpler to love another than to the oneself because it is easier to choose to see only the good in that person. But to love oneself is to accept all the flaws, all the ugliness we may perceive within ourselves. I am aware that I am not a perfect human; I think we all experience shame, regret, selfishness, guilt to a certain degree. I think some individuals are more forgiving and compassionate towards themselves.

We all have physical differences; it all adds to the diversity of humans. But when one's physical differences are constantly mentioned, it does make one aware. I grew up in a very diverse environment in the city, until I moved to the suburbs. I knew I was Mexican then, but I did not realize I was brown. I hadn't thought of color because in the city I went to school with children of multitudes of color and background. I was not self-conscious until a fellow student in the suburbs asked the teacher if I was considered white or black. My skin may be slightly darker, my eyes are dark brown, along with my curly hair. My ancestors gifted me my differences. They are gifts that now I appreciate much more because they are a part of me and a reminder of my roots and culture, which I am proud of.

Loving oneself does not only apply physically. An aspect of humanness is willing to accept our essence: personalities, values, beliefs, and our lifestyles in general. We should protect and cultivate healthy environments for everything we care for, including ourselves as humans. Abraham Maslow, a humanistic psychologist, proposed the concept that humans strive to become self-actualized (Cohen, 2016, p. 51). Meaning when all our multidimensional needs are met, we are capable of realizing our creative and intellectual potential as distinctive human beings granting us a freedom because we are aware of our personal purpose. Knowing our true purpose reduces the aimless wandering to find what will bring us happiness as individuals.

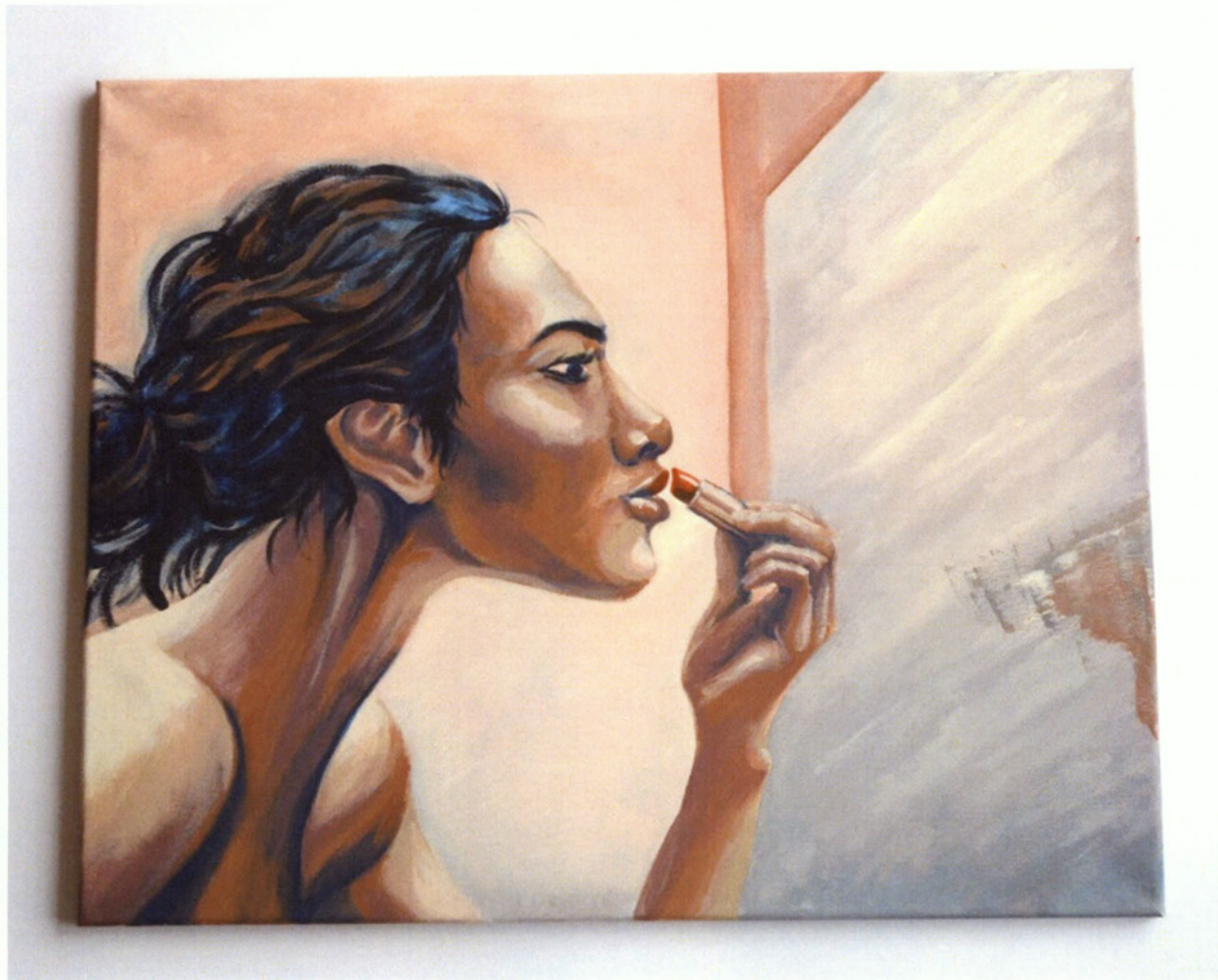


Figure 1.21 Loving Oneself

Acrylic on Canvas; 45 x 50.8 cm (16 x 20 in.)

One of Many Worlds

Although the physical world can be truly breathtaking, the surreal worlds we imagine can also be beautiful. Beauty varies from person to person, which makes our imaginary world uniquely aesthetic to the creator.

I tend to create colorful and organic worlds that bring me a sense of wonder and calmness. They ingest my concerns and fears, and convert them into possibilities of delight.

This particular creation is a world I see as pure and alive. We may live on Earth and it may appear like a giant, but in reality, it is a minuscule rock in comparison to the universe. This piece emphasizes not only the power we have to create these mental worlds, but also how objects in real life inspires them to grow with their own mystery of existence. They need not be realistic nor true. They are figments of imagination that allows us to process real life situations or simply cope within a situation.

This world has an earthiness to me, so I used chalk pastels because the feel of the medium reminds me of the earthiness that our physical world offers. Botany always reminds me of life and its cycle; trees are beings that have the potential to live for hundreds of years and integrate themselves into the environment. In this world, dualities exist of light and darkness, of smooth and roughness, and of existing and nothingness. This small manifestation of a world was made without the concern of other individuals' aesthetic because it was created to fit my personal needs, just like the creation of a mental space.

I connect these imaginative mental spaces closely to Surrealism because the art movement is supposed to represent a "pure psychic automatism," meaning they are creating from the subconscious, without reason or conscious purpose (Janson & Janson, 1995, p. 785). Like dreams, the worlds I create could have several meanings that perhaps I am not fully aware of.



Figure 1.22 One of Many Worlds

Chalk Pastels on Paper; 67 x 99.7 cm ($27 \frac{7}{16}$ x $39 \frac{1}{4}$ in.)

Armor

I decided to finish the show with Armor because it embodies the results of the stepping stones: the transformations underwent to become the present individual. The dress is the final piece of the clothing motif to signify the person is at that moment: the ideal nowness of humanness. It is meant to be light hearted, but also demonstrate the strength gained from the experiences. Our knowledge gives us all the colors to use as a celebration. The sculpture is inspired by the garments prima ballerinas wear. Ballerinas are graceful beings with incredible strength and discipline. They have transformed themselves into living works of art, becoming more ethereal with their seemingly effortless strength.

The sculpture's corset style top is a collage of varied printed design paper. The images are in a randomized arrangement to symbolize the experiences gained or acceptances. Instead of allowing the negative to overtake a human's essence, it is accepted and modified to create meaning. One of the prints is white flowers blooming in darkness. Some of the images reflect more the allowance of the self. I realized adulthood permits humans to experience more, but with more consequences. As an adult, I have more responsibilities. But, I acknowledge my child-like facet in my essence as a human being, which brings a lightheartedness to situations and hope. To demonstrate this aspect, I used little duck printed paper. This creation is supposed to be fun. The bottom of the sculpture is a tutu style skirt made of tulle in several colors. Humans can continue the flow of energy, using their experiences to become more aware and open-minded about their personal humanness and others.

I created another interactive component, in which the viewer is able to draw or write about a transformation that has contributed to their personal growth on origami butterflies to then be attached to the sculpture.



Figure 1.23 Armor

Paper, Tulle, Wire and Wood Sculpture

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